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Office of the Political Adviser,  
Hqs US European Command,  
c/o American Embassy, Paris.

November 8, 1963

Dear John:

I want to call your attention to CINCEUR message to the JCS (ECJCJ 19745) dispatched today giving the Command's conclusions and recommendations concerning the November 4 to 6 Berlin Autobahn incidents and to make some comments about it.

People here have two general observations to make. First, they consider that it would be a mistake (as Berlin suggested during the course of the crisis) to take the matter up at a high political level immediately after the initial blockage has occurred. They favor sticking to the procedures of SHLO 600/128 and exhausting these measures before engaging the Soviets at the diplomatic level. I think the people here recognize that localized actions in themselves are not likely to resolve the question, but they feel that diplomatic protests would be enhanced if the tripartitely-agreed military steps are first executed. We note that the State Department simply gets a run-around from Soviet diplomatic representatives in Washington when the matter is taken up with them. Second, everyone here thinks that our willingness to tolerate increasingly longer delays before we give the Soviets an "ultimatum" is very undesirable. In our view, this means that we are accepting administrative blockage. We all, therefore, think that the issuance of a final notice of intention to proceed without clearance should be given much earlier than it was given this month or last month. The slowness with which we react to the Soviet blockage seems to put us very much on the defensive and is tantamount to acquiescence to one degree or another in Soviet blockage. It is for this reason that we recommend in the message I have cited above that CINCEUR be authorized to order, after a reasonable period of time has expired, the issuance of a 15-minute notice of intention to proceed without clearance.

The apparent differences between Washington and the field on this matter are probably not appreciably different than they are in

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other national security policy matters, and I think we all realize the larger concerns of Washington which are responsible for a certain amount of delay in pushing the matter along, but I want to underscore our feeling that we should not in the future tolerate long delays before acting to up the ante. We realize the stakes involved but are convinced that firmness applied early enough will serve to assert our rights and discourage the Soviets from taking further harassing actions in the future.

As a collateral matter, I would be interested in knowing a little more in detail how Washington operates during such crises; that is, how closely are you in touch with the NMCC and the military action officers? Do you, for example, see without delay the cables going out from this Headquarters? I have assumed that this is the case and have not seen any merit in trying to duplicate military communications by calling the Department to keep them informed. Some guidance on this matter would be useful to me. I might say that I have stayed pretty close to our Operations Center and worked closely with action officers here, at least to the extent of keeping informed about what was transpiring, and have on occasion been able to be of some assistance to them.

I know you are very busy and I hesitate to add to your burdens by asking for a written reply to these questions. Therefore, I suggest that you telephone me sometime at your convenience and give me a rough idea of the procedural arrangements that you are following.

Sincerely,

Alan G. James

cc: G/PM - Col. Robinson  
SSAHEUR - Mr. Parelman